SPIDER-MAN® UNMASKED

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BACK IN BLACK 02.2007

The Sensational SPIDER-MAN®

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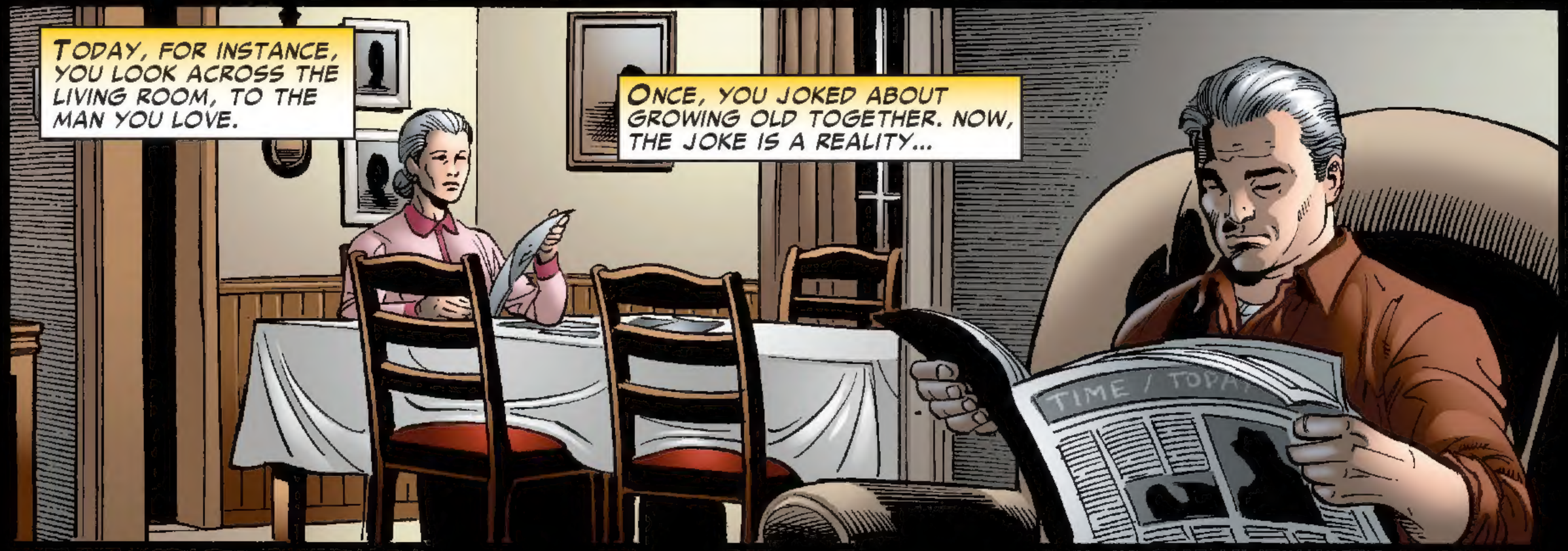
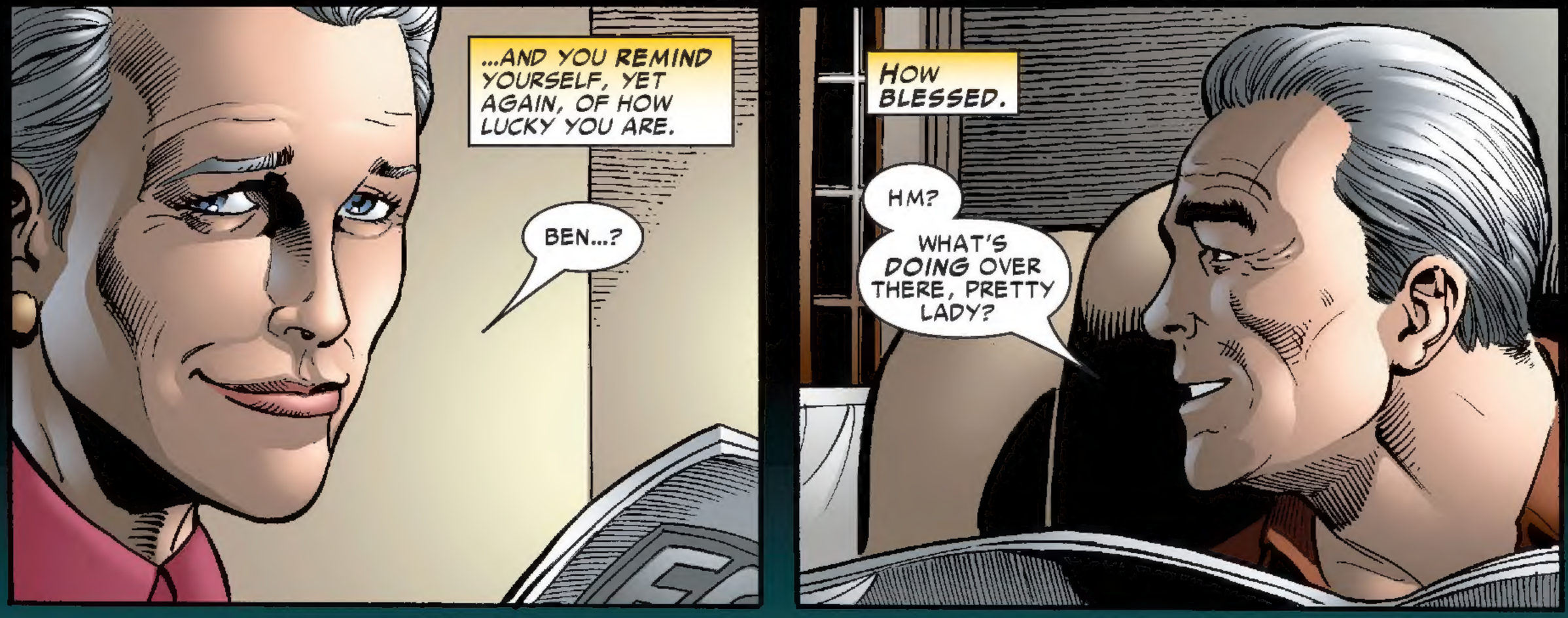
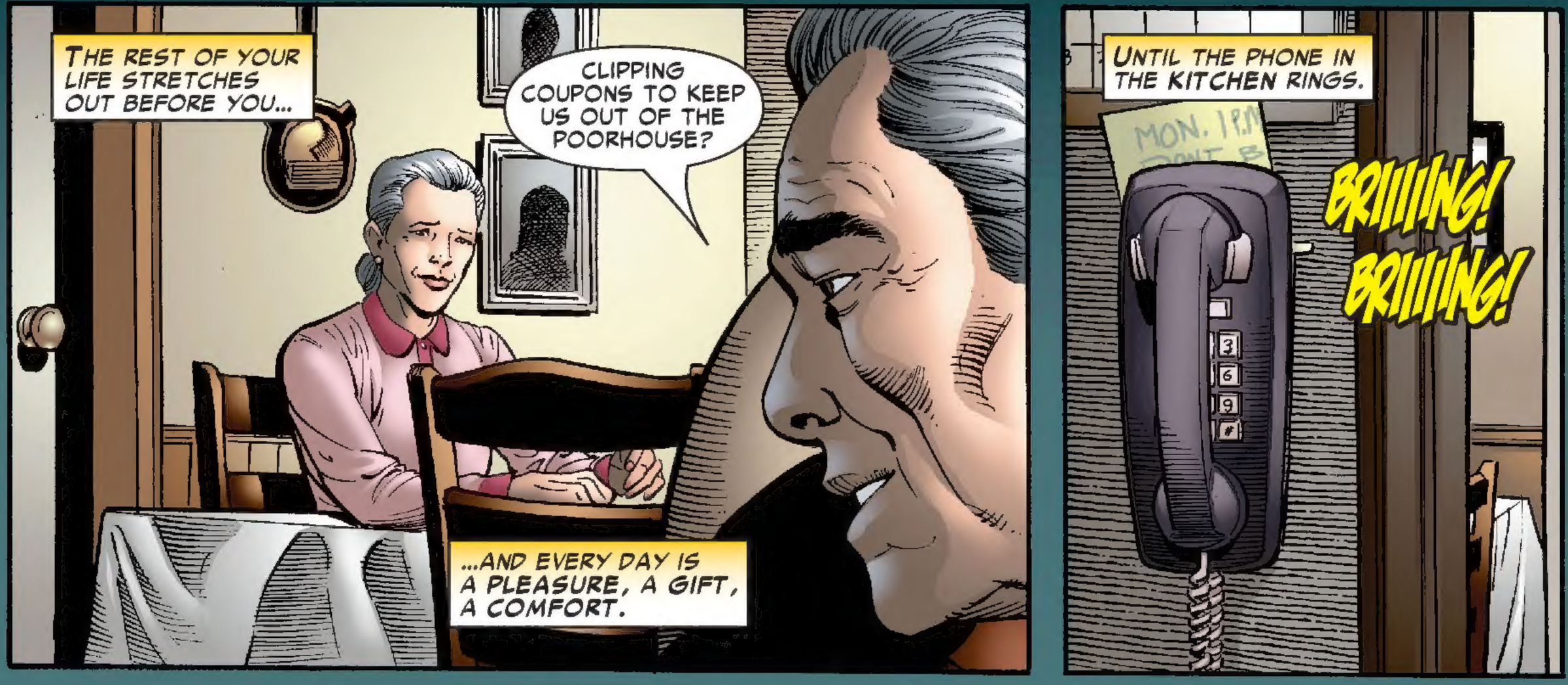
-Crain-

FOODLI
At any given moment, you believe your life is going to go a certain way.


Today, for instance, you look across the living room, to the man you love.
Once, you joked about growing old together. Now, the joke is a reality...
TIME / TODA


...and you remind yourself, yet again, of how lucky you are.
BEN...?
How blessed.
HM?
WHAT'S DOING OVER THERE, PRETTY LADY?


The rest of your life stretches out before you...
CLIPPING COUPONS TO KEEP US OUT OF THE POORHOUSE?
...and every day is a pleasure, a gift, a comfort.
Until the phone in the kitchen rings.
MON. 1 P.M.
BRIIIING!
BRIIIING!

AND EVERYTHING YOU EXPECTED THE FUTURE TO BE, TO HOLD--

...

I'M SORRY, WHAT ARE YOU SAYING ABOUT A PLANE CRASH?

--CHANGES IN THE TIME IT TAKES A SHEET TO BLOW OFF THE LINE.

YOU AND YOUR HUSBAND HAVE A FULL LIFE. IF YOU'D MISSED OUT BY NOT HAVING CHILDREN, IT WASN'T SOMETHING YOU DWELT ON.

...DON'T SEE WHAT OTHER CHOICE WE HAVE, MAY, DO YOU?

NO, I SUPPOSE THERE ISN'T, BEN. PETER'S OUR NEPHEW...

WE'RE HIS ONLY FAMILY NOW.

THE WORDS COME OUT OF YOUR MOUTH MATTER-OF-FACTLY, AND YOU WANT TO BE THE KIND OF STEELY, NO-NONSENSE WOMAN WHO MEANS THEM...

...BUT INSIDE, ALL YOU HAVE ARE QUESTIONS:

CAN YOU AFFORD THIS?

IS THIS THE BEST THING FOR THE CHILD?

DO YOU HAVE THE ENERGY TO RAISE PETER PROPERLY?

DO YOU HAVE ENOUGH LOVE FOR HIM?

YOU START BUILDING A NEW FUTURE IN YOUR MIND. YOU IMAGINE CERTAIN THINGS:

PROMS, GRADUATIONS, THE SOUND OF A YOUNG VOICE FILLING YOUR HOME, YOUR GOLDEN YEARS...

BUT ONE THING YOU DON'T IMAGINE OR EXPECT...

...IS THE FEAR THAT STABS YOUR HEART WHEN YOU FIRST LAY EYES ON THE BABY.

YOU MUST BE THE AUNT AND UNCLE...

CAN I GIVE HIM TO YOU NOW?

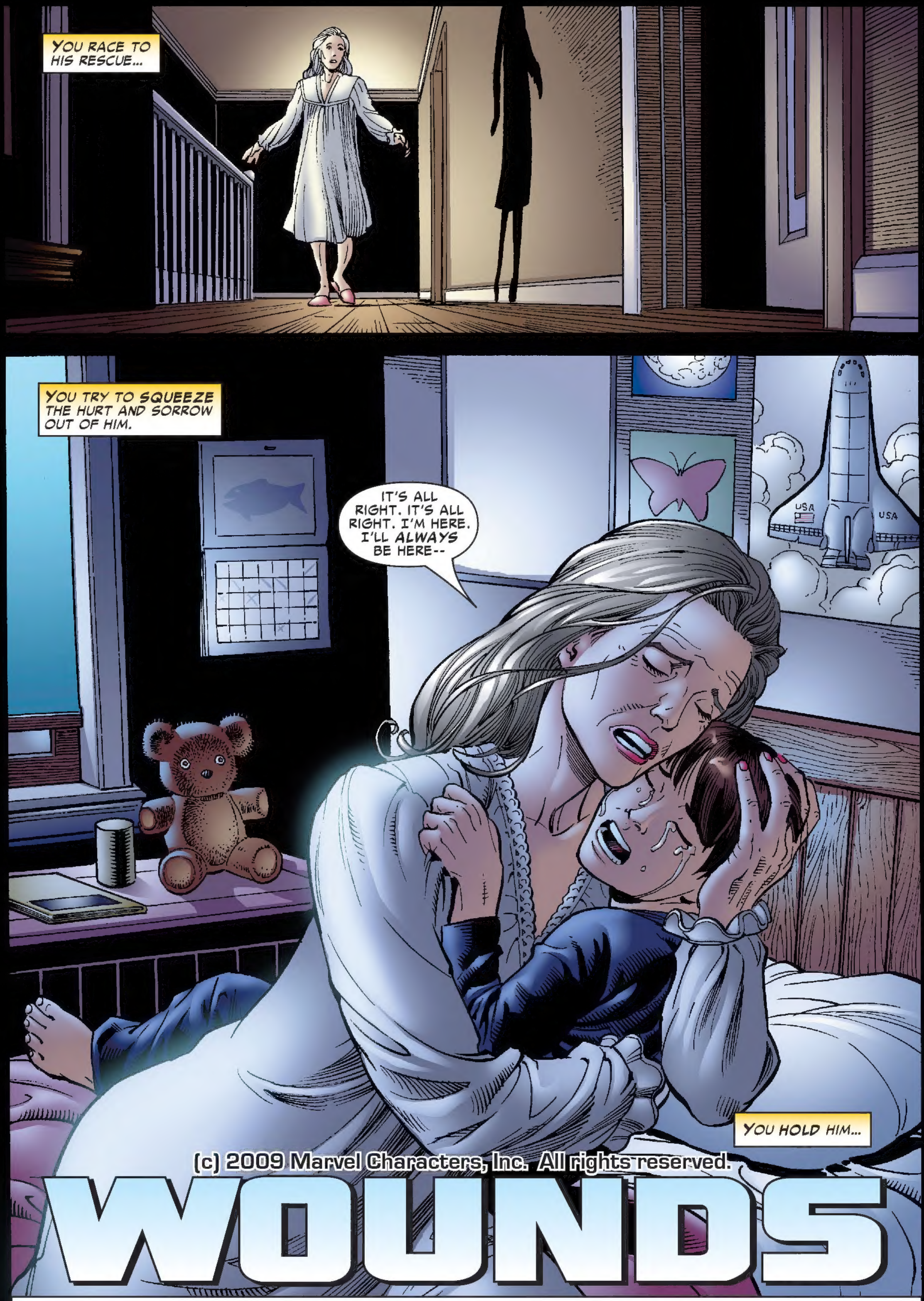
FEAR THAT YOU SOMEHOW WON'T BE THERE WHEN HE NEEDS YOU MOST.

ISN'T HE A HANDSOME DEVIL, MAY?

A FEAR WHICH LINGERS, RESURFACES--

--YEARS LATER, WHEN THE BOY IS OLD ENOUGH TO REALIZE NOT WHAT HE LOST...BUT WHAT HE NEVER HAD.

YOU HEAR HIM THROUGH THE WALL...


YOU RACE TO HIS RESCUE...
YOU TRY TO SQUEEZE THE HURT AND SORROW OUT OF HIM.
IT'S ALL RIGHT. IT'S ALL RIGHT. I'M HERE. I'LL ALWAYS BE HERE--
USA
USA
YOU HOLD HIM...

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WOUNDS

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YEARS LATER, YOU'RE STILL HOLDING HIM...

MARY JANE--MARY JANE, THANK GOD--

--HELP ME GET PETER TO THE BED!

...AND WHO COULD HAVE GUESSED THAT YOUR LIFE WOULD BECOME A CATALOGUE OF BROKEN BONES AND BRUISES.

SECRET IDENTITIES REVEALED.

SUPER HERO CIVIL WARS.

BEING ON THE RUN.

GOD, MAY, WHAT HAPPENED?

HAVING NO HOME.

PETER SAID... ...THE RHINO?

REELING FROM ATTACK AFTER ATTACK.

OH, GOD. THE RHINO DID THIS?

PETER? PETER, CAN YOU TALK?

...DUMB... MISTAKE...

...I'M NOT AT A...A HUNDRED PERCENT AND ALEKSEI...

...WALED ON ME...AND *KEPT* WALING ON ME...

THAT NEANDERTHAL...

WHY?

...HE... AMBUSHED ME...

...MAYBE... A LEFTOVER... FROM THE CHAMELEON...

PETER, LISTEN TO ME: YOU NEED A DOCTOR. I'M GONNA GO FIND YOU A--

NO!

...NO DOCTOR... I'LL...BE OKAY...

NO OFFENSE, TIGER, BUT YOU'RE ***BROKEN*** AND ***BLEEDING***. IF WE DON'T FIND YOU SOMEONE ***ASAP***, WHAT DO YOU ***THINK'S*** GONNA HAPPEN?

...

...HE'LL ***HEAL***, MARY JANE. ***THAT'S*** WHAT WILL HAPPEN.

WITH OUR HELP, OF COURSE.

"GO TO THE PHARMACY. TAKE THE REST OF OUR MONEY, WHATEVER WE HAVE, AND GET ME THREE ROLLS OF GAUZE...A LARGE TUBE OF NEOSPORIN...AND A BOTTLE OF ASPIRIN."

"ASPIRIN?"

"EXTRA-STRENGTH...

"...YOU GO ON NOW. I'LL STAY WITH PETER AND GET HIM CLEANED UP."

ABLE TV
VACANCY

...I MUST LOOK...

...PRETTY *ROTTEN*, HUH?...

OH, I'VE SEEN YOU WORSE, PETER.

...YOU MEAN...AFTER *MORLUN?*

THAT WASN'T...

"...THAT WASN'T YOUR *FINEST* MOMENT, NO...

"...BUT I WAS THINKING *FURTHER* BACK, ACTUALLY."

YOU REMEMBER... TOMMY MONKS?

LITTLE BOY WHO LIVED TWO HOUSES DOWN FROM US?

"YEAH... I KIND OF DO, ACTUALLY..."

"I SHOULDN'T WONDER. THE WAY YOU GOT ON TOGETHER."

C'MON, PETE, IT'S EASY!

YOU GO AHEAD. I'LL WAIT HERE.

WE USED TO PLAY...ALL THE TIME...

YOU DID, YES.

UNTIL HE BROKE YOUR ARM.

"HE DID? WAIT, WHAT?"

SEE? IT'S NOT SO BAD! C'MON, LET'S CLIMB HIGHER!

UHM, I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THIS, TOMMY...

SEEN ME *WHAT*, AUNT MAY?

"OH, IT WAS VERY *TRAUMATIC*, BELIEVE YOU ME. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME I'D SEEN YOU...YOU..."

...*HURT*, PETER.

NOW DON'T GET HYSTERICAL, MAY, THE BOY'S *FINE*--

LET ME THROUGH, BEN PARKER, OR YOU'LL BE THANKFUL WE'RE IN A HOSPITAL--

ALL RIGHT, BUT IT LOOKS A *LOT* WORSE--

PETER? PETER, I'M HERE NOW--

OH, MY GOD--

HEY, AUNT MAY...

"...WHAT'S SHAKIN', BACON?"

AUNT MAY, TOMMY MONKS *DIDN'T* BREAK MY ARM. I FELL OUT OF THAT TREE BECAUSE... WELL, BECAUSE I WAS A *KLUTZ* BACK THEN.

OH, IS THAT RIGHT? AND *WHO* ENCOURAGED YOU? WHO *GOADED* YOU UP THOSE LIMBS?

HE WAS TWELVE YEARS OLD--

HE WAS *OLDER* THAN YOU, PETER, HE SHOULD'VE *KNOWN* BETTER.

NOW WHY DON'T YOU STOP ARGUING WITH ME AND GET SOME REST?

EXIT

HOW'S THAT COFFEE?

HOT CHOCOLATE, ACTUALLY. AND IT'S LIKE *MUD*, BUT I GOT IT FROM A MACHINE IN THE MOTEL'S *LOBBY* FOR 75 CENTS, SO I'M TRYING NOT TO *DWELL*.

YOU WANT A SIP?

LORD, NO. I'D LIKE A *SEAT*. DO YOU MIND?

MI BENCH *ES*...

...YOUR BENCH, TOO.

MARY JANE--

MAY--

GO AHEAD, DEAR.

NO, YOU--YOU FIRST--

I'M SORRY FOR *SNAPPING* AT YOU EARLIER, DEAR. AND FOR SENDING YOU TO THE PHARMACY LIKE IT WAS A *PUNISHMENT*. IT'S JUST... I *SEE* PETER LIKE THAT, AND...

...AND A *WALL* COMES DOWN...

...AND *SOMETIMES*... IT COMES DOWN ON THE WRONG PEOPLE.

I UNDERSTAND. AND *MY* FIRST IMPULSE IS ALWAYS TO *RUN*, SO I ACTUALLY APPRECIATED THE EXCUSE TO...YOU KNOW...GET AWAY FOR AWHILE.

...

THIS IS WHAT WE *DO*, ISN'T IT? *KEEP VIGIL*...

EVERY SECOND OF EVERY DAY, YEP...

GOD, HOW DO WE *HOLD IT TOGETHER*, MAY? HOW DO WE NOT COME APART LIKE TISSUE PAPER?

ASK ME AGAIN TOMORROW MORNING AND I'LL TELL YOU.

HOPEFULLY, BY THEN, I'LL HAVE AN *ANSWER*.

...

I HEARD YOU IN THERE, TALKING ABOUT WHEN PETER BROKE HIS ARM...?

"THAT'S RIGHT, DEAR. YOU SHOULD HAVE *SEEN* THE STATE I WAS IN..."

OKAY, NURSE PARKER, TIME TO PACK IT IN.

HMM?

NOW DON'T *START*, MAY. VISITING HOURS ARE OVER, THE BOY'S ASLEEP...

THIS *SECOND* HE IS. BUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN HE WAKES UP IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT AND WANTS A DRINK OF WATER? OR HE *DOESN'T* SEE THAT LIGHT UNDER THE DOOR?

UH... WHAT LIGHT IS THAT?

THE LIGHT FROM THE HALL THAT TELLS HIM HE'S NOT *ALONE*. THAT TELLS HIM IT'S ALL RIGHT TO GO TO SLEEP BECAUSE *WE'RE* STILL UP.

HUH.

IS *THAT* WHY WE KEEP THAT LAMP ON?

DON'T WORRY, I TURN IT OFF WHEN *YOU* GO TO SLEEP. WHICH IS EXACTLY *FOUR MINUTES* AFTER YOUR HEAD HITS THE PILLOW, BEN PARKER.

MAY, YOU'RE NOT *ALLOWED--*

I'M JUST SITTING HERE WITH MY BOOK, BEN, NOT BOTHERING *ANYBODY--*

MAY, LISTEN TO ME: PETER'S A GROWING BOY. AND FROM TIME TO TIME...GROWING BOYS GET *HURT*. IT'S A FACT OF LIFE THAT YOU'RE JUST GONNA HAVE TO GET USED TO, I'M AFRAID.

YOU KNOW HOW MANY BONES *I'VE* BROKEN OVER THE YEARS?

BUT PETER'S NOT LIKE YOU, BEN. HE ISN'T AS...*HARDY* AS YOU. HE'S... *SENSITIVE*.

MAY PARKER, THAT'S MALARKEY AND YOU KNOW IT. HE'S *PLENTY* HARDY, AND WE *SHOULDN'T* KEEP BABYING HIM, BECAUSE OVER THE YEARS, WE'RE GONNA SEE *A LOT* OF BUSTED BONES, *A LOT* OF BLOODY NOSES, *A LOT* OF BLACK EYES.

NO MATTER HOW MUCH WE TRY TO PROTECT HIM, THOSE THINGS ARE GONNA HAPPEN. BUT THAT'S *OKAY*, AND I'LL TELL YOU WHY:

EACH TIME IT HAPPENS, PETER'LL *TOUGHEN* UP SOME. GET *STRONGER*. MAKE SENSE?

BEN...

...IF YOU'RE *DONE* TRYING TO CONVINCE ME THAT IT'S A *GOOD THING* OUR NEPHEW'S LYING IN THERE WITH A BROKEN ARM, I'D LIKE TO GET BACK TO MY BOOK.

SIGH

WELL, AT LEAST YOU HEARD ME OUT...

I DID. AND WHEN YOU COME BACK TOMORROW MORNING, WILL YOU BRING ME AN EGG MCMUFFIN AND A SANKA FROM MCDONALD'S?

INTERLUDE.

NEW YORK AT NIGHT.

BARS

THE LONG-SHUTTERED JUNGLE CLUB, DOWN IN THE BOWERY.

JUNGLE CLUB

WHERE ELSE WOULD YOU EXPECT TO FIND A RHINO?

STUPID. STUPID. STUPID.

CHAMELEON CAUGHT

NOT TO GET PAID BY THE CHAMELEON BEFOREHAND...

MURDER PLOT FOILED

...YES, ALEKSEI, THAT WAS STUPID.

ESPECIALLY NOW THAT THE CHAMELEON AND HIS OTHER "DEADLY FOES" ARE IN JAIL.

WHICH MEANS YOU TOOK SPIDER-MAN DOWN FOR NOTHING...

SKERASHK

...AND ATTRACTED THE ATTENTION OF GOD-KNOWS-WHO IN THE PROCESS.

SPIDER...?

--THE FOLLOWING FOOTAGE, A FOX NEWS EXCLUSIVE, WAS TAKEN BY A TOURIST ON HIS WAY TO CENTRAL PARK... IN IT, FUGITIVE-AT-LARGE PETER PARKER, BETTER KNOWN TO THE WORLD AS THE ROGUE SUPER HERO, SPIDER-MAN...

...IS RECEIVING WHAT IS PERHAPS A WELL-DESERVED BEATING AT THE HANDS OF HIS FREQUENT NEMESIS ALEKSEI SYTSEVICH, A.K.A. THE RHINO...

...DETAILS ABOUT THE BRAWL ARE STILL COMING IN, AND THOUGH THE CURRENT WHEREABOUTS OF BOTH PARTICIPANTS ARE UNKNOWN, ONE EYE-WITNESS HAD THIS TO SAY...

channel

...I DON'T KNOW *WHAT*, BUT RHINO WAS *ALL* JACKED UP ON SUMTHIN'...AND SPIDEY...SPIDEY GOT A *SERIOUS* BUTT-WHUPPIN'... HE WAS *ALL* MESSED UP, *HOBBLING* AND WHATNOT...

CLICK!

WELL...

...AT LEAST YOU DIDN'T *TRASH* THE TELEVISION THIS TIME.

I PICKED US UP SOME FOOD, CAT. YOUR FAVORITE. *SUSHI.*

OH, BUT THOMAS, I ALREADY BRUSHED MY *TEETH*--

--AND I *JUST* LOST MY APPETITE.

BECAUSE OF WHAT A CERTAIN *PACHYDERM* DID TO YOUR EX-BOYFRIEND?

NOW, NOW, DON'T GET *JEALOUS*...

...ESPECIALLY WHEN I WANT *US* TO GO OUT AND PAINT THE TOWN *RED*.

END INTERLUDE.

YOU WASH...

YOU SCRUB...

YOU'VE BEEN SCRUBBING FOR DECADES NOW...

MRS. PARKER...?

MRS. PARKER, I CAME BY TO...CHECK ON PETEY. TO...MAKE SURE HE'S OKAY AND EVERYTHING.

"OKAY AND EVERYTHING." NO, TOMMY, PETER IS *NOT* "OKAY AND EVERYTHING." HIS ARM'S GOING TO BE IN A CAST FOR THE NEXT SIX WEEKS. ON TOP OF WHICH...I SINCERELY *DOUBT* HE'LL EVER GET OVER HIS FEAR OF HEIGHTS NOW.

I KNOW. I'M *SO* SORRY ABOUT THAT, MRS. PARKER. I DIDN'T REALIZE HOW HIGH UP WE WERE, AND...AND...

...IF I *COULD*, I'D SWITCH PLACES WITH HIM RIGHT NOW.

YES, WELL...IT'S A LITTLE *LATE* TO BE SORRY NOW, ISN'T IT, TOMMY? AND *EASY ENOUGH* TO SAY YOU'D SWITCH PLACES WITH PETER, BUT THE SIMPLE FACT OF THE MATTER IS--

TOMMY.

PETER'S UPSTAIRS IN HIS ROOM, DOING HIS HOMEWORK... WHY DON'T YOU GO ON UP AND SEE IF YOU CAN'T GET IT FROM HIM? SO YOU CAN TURN IT IN FOR HIM TOMORROW?

I'D CONSIDER IT A FAVOR.

YESSIR.

GO AHEAD. TELL ME I'M CRAZY.

AS A FOX, BUT YOU KNOW WHAT...?

...I WOULDN'T WANT YOU TO BE ANY OTHER WAY.

ON TOP OF WHICH, I WANTED TO WRING THAT KID'S NECK SAME AS YOU.

YOU REMEMBER WHAT HIS ARMS FELT LIKE...

GHOST LIMBS WRAPPED AROUND YOUR BODY...

YOU FORCE YOURSELF NOT TO CRY.

HEY, AUNT MAY...

...HOW YOU DOING WITH THAT STINKY THING?

WELL, AFTER IT SOAKS, I'LL HAVE SOME SEWING TO DO, SINCE IT'S STILL...

...

...UNLIKE YOU, PETER DEAR, WHO SEEM TO HAVE SNAPPED BACK.

YEP. FEEL FREE TO CALL ME RUBBER BAND GUY, IF YOU WANT...

...I'M ACTUALLY FEELING LIKE I'M AT...*EIGHTY-FIVE PERCENT*. YOU KNOW I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A *FAST HEALER*, AUNT MAY, BUT NOW IT SEEMS LIKE I'M EVEN *MORE* OF ONE...

HEY, DO WE HAVE ANY FOOD LIKE HOSTESS TWINKIES? I'M *STAH-ARE-VING*...

DID SOMEBODY SAY "TWINKIES"...?

WHICH I JUST HAPPEN TO HAVE IN THIS BAG?

SUPER SHIP

ARE YOU *KIDDING?*

MARY JANE--

--WILL YOU MARRY ME?

BEFORE I ANSWER, YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT I *BLEW* THE LAST OF OUR MONEY TO GET YOU THOSE *TOXIC THINGS*. WHICH AREN'T EVEN *BAKED*, BY THE WAY, THEY'RE--

--CREATED BY A COLD CHEMICAL REACTION--I KNOW, I SAW THAT SPECIAL ON THE FOOD NETWORK. *AND* I'M A SCIENTIST, DON'T FORGET.

WHICH IS WHY *YOU*, OF ALL PEOPLE, SHOULD KNOW BETTER. I MEAN, DO YOU *SERIOUSLY* THINK REED RICHARDS WOULD EVER PUT SOMETHING THAT *HEINOUS* INTO HIS BODY?

AND AS EASY AS THAT, EVERYTHING SEEMS RIGHT IN THE UNIVERSE. HIS BRUISES AND BATTLES FORGOTTEN. DISPELLED BY THE MORNING LIGHT.

HIS INJURIES AND HURTS...

...WELL, THEY'RE YOURS NOW, AREN'T THEY?

EVERY SINGLE SCAR HE CARRIES...

(...AND MANY HE DOESN'T...)

...YOU DO, AS WELL.

THEY'RE YOUNG. THEY HAVEN'T LEARNED YET...

THAT LIFE IS AN ACCUMULATION OF PAIN AND WOUNDS. YOUR OWN. THOSE BELONGING TO THE PEOPLE YOU LOVE.

...

AT ANY GIVEN MOMENT, YOU BELIEVE YOUR LIFE IS GOING TO GO A CERTAIN WAY...

UNTIL--IN THE TIME IT TAKES A SHEET TO BLOW FREE--IT ALL CHANGES...

...AND ALL YOU'RE LEFT WITH IS WOUNDS...

END.